

Magistrate

with Honorable Robin Dillard-Russaw, 46th District Court

Keywords

Access to Justice – Justice is made available to everyone through courts that are open to all.

Arraignment – A pretrial court hearing in a criminal case when the defendant is told the charges, appointed an attorney if necessary, required to plead to the charges (e.g. guilty, not guilty), and granted bail if appropriate.

Attorney – A professional who has earned a law degree, passed the bar exam, and is licensed by the State Bar of Michigan to practice law in the state. Also known as a lawyer.

Bail – A way to release a defendant before trial by having him or her, or someone on his or her behalf, deposit money with the court or agree to pay a certain amount to make sure the defendant returns for trial or other proceedings.

Civil Cases – Noncriminal cases between two or more parties, often involving money.

Crime – Violation of criminal law punishable by imprisonment and/or a fine and/or costs (money).

Criminal Justice – Laws, procedures, institutions (including courts), and policies related to crime and its consequences. Criminals and crime victims have certain rights, and prosecution and punishment must follow set laws.

Dispute Resolution – A way to solve a disagreement with someone else without going to trial. It usually involves a neutral third party who helps the sides work out the dispute.

District Court – A trial court that handles civil suits involving up to \$25,000; adult criminal misdemeanor offenses; civil infractions; landlord/tenant disputes; small claims; ordinance and charter violations; and land contract forfeitures. Additionally, all adult criminal proceedings begin in the District Court. In carrying out this function, the District Court issues arrest and search warrants, sets bail, accepts bonds, conducts arraignments and probable cause conferences, and presides over preliminary examinations.

Informal Hearing – A hearing in District Court conducted by a magistrate or judge that involves the police officer, the defendant, and any witnesses. An informal hearing is held without a prosecutor or defense attorney.

Law School – A three-year course of study after earning a bachelor's (undergraduate) degree; schools must be accredited (officially approved) by the American Bar Association.

Magistrate – In Michigan, a quasi-judicial official of the District Court who has the power to set bail, accept bond, accept guilty pleas and impose sentence for traffic and other related violations, and conduct informal hearings on civil infractions.

Major – A field of study at the undergraduate level with requirements to assure a student has a particular level of knowledge.

Prosecuting Attorney – An attorney that brings criminal cases to court on behalf of the People of the State of Michigan.

Search Warrant – A written order from a judge or magistrate directing an officer to search a specific place for a specific object, issued upon a showing of probable cause.

Small Claims – A division of the District Court, the Small Claims Court hears civil cases of \$6,000 or less. A case may be presented to a judge or an attorney magistrate.

Solo Practitioner – A lawyer who works independently, not in a law firm with other lawyers.

Statutes – Laws in the State of Michigan enacted by the State Legislature.

For more definitions, see the Michigan Judicial Institute's [Handbook of Legal Terms](#).